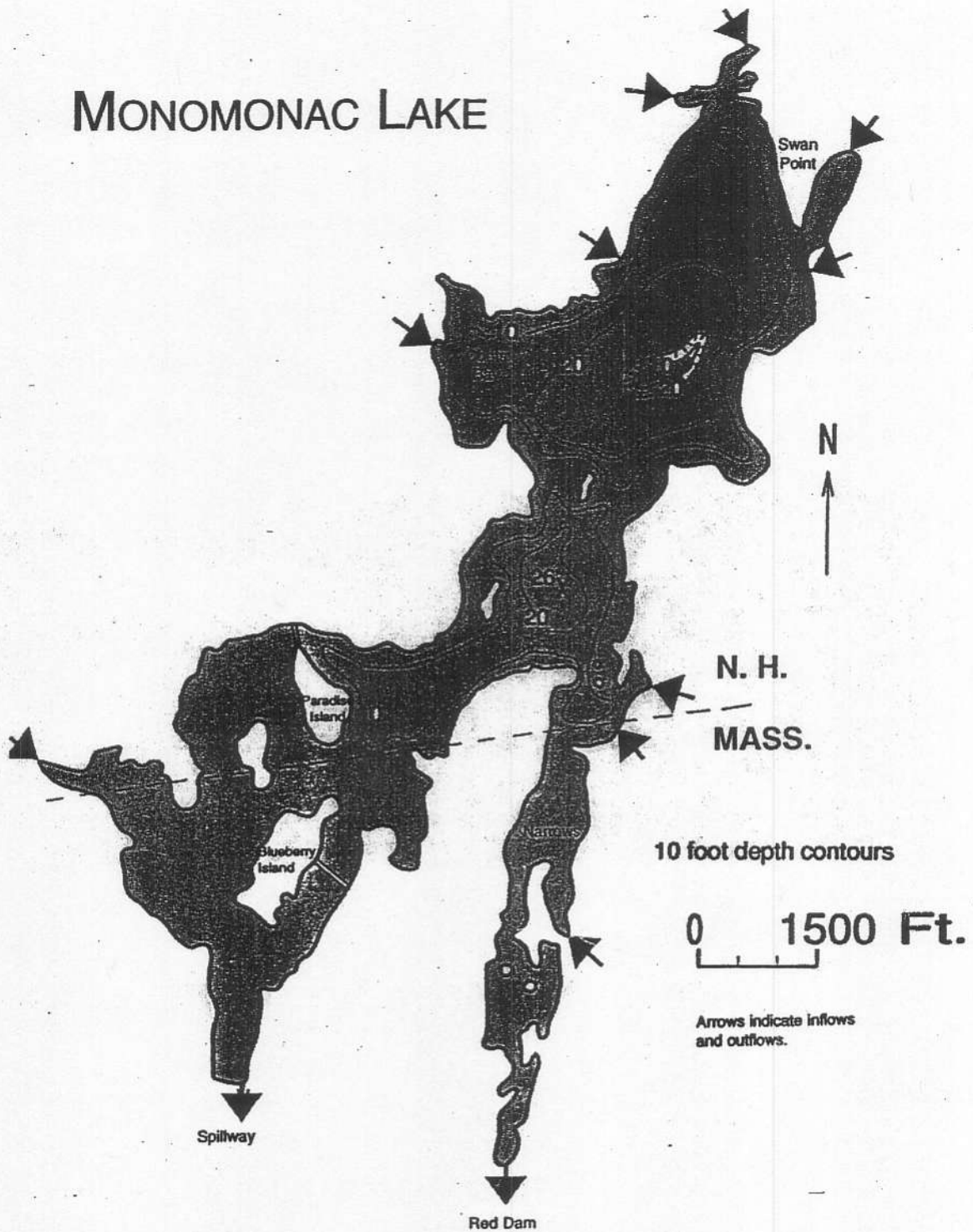


From Cotton to Cottages

Evolution of Lake Monomonac

by
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MONOMONAC LAKE



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Cover photo by Wilma Allen

INTRODUCING MONOMONAC...

Who can resist a lake so lovely - cradled in forests between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, shimmering brightly in the sun, bluer than Robins' eggs. If you get really close, say paddling a kayak, you enter a new world - alive with dragonflies, jumping fish, turtles sunning on stumpy branches, a great blue heron standing by.

On a float you can drift all day to the rhythms of the lake, wondering - what's at the bottom, how big are the fish, where does the water come from, where does it go, what kind of ducks are those, how can the kingfisher dive like that, where are the baby herons...

In winter, its blanket of snow and ice reflect the purity of the heavens. Animals reveal their neighborly presence with meandering tracks along the shore.

When I first paddled around Monomonac, I supposed it had been here forever, soaking up the sun like the hills and forests rising from its distant shores. I imagined how pure and tranquil it must have been in its primeval state before houses, dams, beaches, roads, docks, and walls of timber, rock and concrete lined the shore.

But as I explored its depths seeking answers to my many questions, I made some unexpected discoveries. Monomonac is not a natural lake. It's not even old. It used to be river, streams, ponds and wetlands. People made it what it is today, and could turn it back into ponds in a weekend.

In hopes that you will find them interesting, here are a few things I unearthed about the origin and heart of Monomonac.

BIRTH OF A LAKE

Many New England lakes were formed during the last ice age, 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, when gigantic sheets of ice carved mountain ranges and valleys across the Northern Hemisphere. On their retreat to the North, glaciers broke up and melted forming pools, ponds and very deep lakes in the valleys and depressions that were left behind.

Some of the deepest New Hampshire lakes include Winnepesaukee and Newfound, each reaching depths of 180 feet. Lake Sunapee and Granite Lake are over 100' deep. These are glacial lakes. Monomonac is not.

At its deepest, Monomonac is 26', but its average depth is about 13.' Areas like 'Stump Pond' are much shallower. These shallow areas were probably forests or wetlands before dams were built around the time of the Civil War. Early maps show how great a difference dams made, and how many lakes wouldn't be here without them.

One of the earliest New England maps, drawn in 1768 by J. Green, London, shows far fewer bodies of water than exist today. Among them, however, is 'Wonomenok Pond' in Rindge which is adjacent to a smaller 'Sunday Pond'. 1780 and 1796 maps also show Wonomenok Pond, up approximately where Emerson Pond is today, and North of, but not connected to an unnamed lake on the Massachusetts border with an outlet in Winchendon.

Early mapmakers were clearly more interested in land boundaries than water ones, so when New Hampshire maps were drawn only the northern side of Monomonac was shown. Massachusetts maps showed only the southern side. Seldom was the lake drawn completely.

In 1816, New Hampshire's Secretary of State, Phillip Carrigain, published what was considered an extremely accurate and detailed map of the State. His map, which took 13 years to complete, shows the NH portion of a 'Monomonock Pond' right where our lake is now. Fifteen years later, Winchendon resident and surveyor, Elias Whitney drew the Massachusetts side. Apparently this map was 'tolerably correct as to distances and locations, but full of errors in respect to names of persons and places,' according to one report. It shows Monomonac Pond, bounded by 'barren hills,' with a narrow pass to 'Spring Factory Village' (now Winchendon Springs). Whitney's father owned land at Spring Factory Village, so we can assume that Elias knew this area pretty well and its representation is 'tolerably correct.'